

What's in Our Trash?

Maine State Planning Office

Waste Management & Recycling Program



Do you ever wonder what makes up the 1.7 million tons of trash that Mainers generate each year? The following waste composition analysis, performed by the University of Maine in 1991, indicates what we would find in an average trash truck on an average collection day. Why is this information important? See the reverse for discussion.

Annual Average Percentage Weight of Waste Categories for Maine Municipalities		
Waste Category	Percentage of Waste Stream	Percentage of Category
PAPER		
Corrugated (OCC)	2.92	8.83
High grade	3.04	9.22
Magazines	2.92	8.84
Newspaper	9.88	29.91
Other	14.09	42.64
Telephone Books	0.19	0.56
Total paper	33.04	100
PLASTIC		
Bags	1.59	23.81
HDPE	1.23	18.41
Other	2.75	41.07
Rigid	1.12	16.71
Total Plastic	6.69	100
GLASS		
Clear	3.39	83.46
Green/Brown	0.17	4.28
Other	0.5	12.26
Total Glass	4.06	100
METAL		
Aluminum	0.39	11.76
Ferrous	0.55	16.72
Nonferrous	0.07	2.09
Tin/Steel Cans	2.28	69.43
Total Metal	3.29	100
OTHER		
Food Waste	27.81	52.56
Batteries	0.13	0.25
Cat-Pet Waste	3.86	7.3
Composite	4.74	8.96
Cosmetic/Toilet	0.61	1.15
Deposit Cont.	0.67	1.27
Diapers	3.78	7.14
Furniture/Carpeting	0.46	0.87
Hazardous	1.32	2.49
Household Demo	2.14	4.04
Miscellaneous	3.15	5.95
Textiles	4.24	8.01
Total Other Waste	52.91	100

Notes on the Waste Composition Analysis

The analysis on the front of this fact sheet accounts for Nonbulky Domestic Solid Waste, meaning that it does not include couches, large appliances, tires, etc. The waste composition analysis consists of the everyday waste items that are normally placed in a common 30-gallon plastic garbage bag. It is also important to note that leaf and yard waste was not included in the analysis due to the wide variations in disposal by households.

Why do a Waste Composition Analysis in the First Place?

Waste composition analyses are very important to recycling and waste reduction efforts. When planners at the municipal or state level look at a waste stream analysis, they can see right away which materials are most abundant and should therefore be targeted by waste reduction and recycling programs and campaigns. This is an important tool for prioritizing efforts, especially when staff, time and funding are limited.

For more information, please contact:
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